HARAMBEE FLAME

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BLACK HISTORY IN REVIEW

This February edition of the FLAME is being put together at the end of February, following our consistent practice of being a month behind. Why this is the case is a long story. Nonetheless, the lateness of this issue has given us an opportunity to review the events and activities of "Black History Month." We have an opportunity now to reflect.

Why do we have a Black History month? We conduct the activities of this period in order aid ourselves in the maintenance of pride in ourselves as a people, as black people. We remind ourselves of the accomplishments that our people have made in this country, our contributions. This is constructive. Considering the prevalence of white racism in this country and the many negative impacts it has on us, it is good for us to know that we are not an inferior people, that we too have among us scientists, inventors, great educators, etc.

It is important that we know that we have contributed to this nation's development because this knowledge gives us cause to claim a stake in this place. To know that we have fought bravely for this nation in war, that we have shed our blood, moves us to declare that we have made an investment in the growth of the United States and that we have a right to dividends. We can, in other words, demand rights because we have earned and fought for them.

While we should know that our people have made contributions, we should also be discriminating and be able to distinguish between those contributions made by us which are worthy of praise and those which constitute shameful pages of our history in this land. How is it said: "All that glitters is not gold"? For example, while it is useful for us to be able to say that an American-born Afrikan may have been renowned for his courage and expertise as a member of the U.S. Calvary(Afterall, don't we want to be able to say that we can fight as well as white folks?), if that American-born Afrikan gained this reputation through the forceful theft of this land from its native people(so-called "Indians"), there is little about this "contribution" which is worthy of our pride. Similarly, we like to point to "the first black" in a particular field. But what if the first black in, for example, a political office was no more than a puppet for the interests of white folks, would we not be foolish to be uncritical in our citing of this person's "accomplishment"?

The many "Black History" spots doled out to us this past month by the commercial media via the voices or pens of its token blacks has made this lack of critical examination by us of our history quite evident. While we have heard and read a good deal about "safe" black folks--inventors, doctors, blacks in the U.S. military, and so forth, we've been doled out little in the way of commemoration of the lives and achievements of those of us who were courageous for us. We read or heard little about people like Fannie Lou Hamer, Fred Hampton, Mark Clark, Nat Turner, and other such folks who devoted and/or gave their lives on our behalf, as opposed to on behalf of the U.S. Establishment.

And finally, too many of us(both individuals and organizations) have not been mindful that we are more than "black" people, that our history did not begin in this land. Our history begins with the history of Afrika. And unless we grasp our Afrikanness, we can be no one.

QUEEN NZINGA

"For centuries, the Europeans, content to overcome by trading and religion, rather than by might, had been gradually penetrating the African continent on the west coast. By the 15th. century, Portugal had made incursions deep into the area of the Kongo, all under the guise of 'Christian Enlightenment.' Numbers of the kings had been converted, relinquishing their African names for Portuguese titles under baptism and allowing European 'aides' in their courts.

"All went as planned until during the late 16th. and early 17th. century, the Portuguese became unmasked through from time immemorial. A slave, before the commercial aspects of slavery entered in such a large measure during European expansion and colonizing of the 'New World,' was analogous to a prisoner-of-war.

"When this 'new' concept of slavery was understood, the Blacks began to resist in the section of the Kongo known as Ndongo, now as Angola. Ann Nzinga(also recorded as 'Zingha' or 'Jinga' in various writings), the sister of the king of Ndongo was a fierce abolitionist and Supreme Commander of of the army who waged incessant battles with her (sometime)allies the Jagas against the Portuguese. For years, guerilla type warfare was carried out by Nzinga, her strong Amazon army and loyal male warriors until, repeatedly defeating the Europeans, a peace conference was called in 1622. Ann was appointed her country's emissary.

"Upon entering the conference room she and her escorts quickly determined that all whites were seated, but no such provision had been made for her. In a swift movement, the magnificent carpet brought with them was rolled out and an attendant fell to all fours to form a human throne upon which Nzinga sat.

"Uncompromisingly, she refused to recognize the Portuguese 'right' to rule her country and demanded that they leave the capital of Kabasa. The one area of agreement was that prisoners-of-war would be exchanged. Thus was the treaty enacted. It was quickly nullified when the Portuguese began raids for slaves in the Kongo almost at once.

"In 1623, after her brother had died, Nzinga became Queen and relinquished the name Anna acquired during her conversion to Christianity the year before while at the peace conference. To secure her position of strength and believing firmly in abolition, she declared that the area she controlled was a free country, the only such on the entire continent, and thus a haven for any and all slaves who could reach Angola. In addition, she sent agents into the Portuguese army to infiltrate the ranks and encourage masses of the Black soldiers fighting under Portugal to defect to her army, bringing their guns and ammunition with them.

"Frightened, the Portuguese attacked and forced her to retreat andflee the country. Accepting her flight as a signal of defeat, Portugal appointed a vassal as King Phillip I of Ndongo. Nzinga's people refused to accept this for through drum signals they were made aware that she would return when the time was right.

"Return she did in 1627 at the head of a stronger army of her dauntless Amazons and well-trained men. Those at home had not abandoned her; instead, they flocked together in a force of Black unity that has not been duplicated. The Portuguese could not countenance such a show of Black power and offered a huge reward for her, dead or alive, with freedom and land included. Freedom under her, they already had, but rather than sacrificing her people's lives in an all-out defense of her, she again slipped out of the country and ordered the

rumor be spread that she had been killed.

"Once again in 1629, she reappeared, this time with the Jaga as her allies. Again the Portuguese were clearly defeated and a new peace treaty was offered. She refused the majority of their demands. For over three decades she continued warring against the Portuguese and allying herself with the Dutch(who had by now entered the continent to contest the Portuguese for colonies) when it seemed expedient.

"Queen Nzinga spent the last decade of her life rebuilding her country and a stable economy. It remained a haven for all who were against slavery. Today, Angola continues to fight colonization in the spirit of Nzinga."

-Excerpted from the Black History supplement to the MILWAUKEE COURIER; Feb. 13, 1982

FROM OTHER SOURCES

Were we to be graded--"...The Black community deserves another F for allowing itself to be manipulated by the demagogues and charlatans who pose as national leaders and exploit the misery of the poor, helpless masses for their own personal advancement.

"The movie industry shut Afros out of the creative and business areas completely. But the Gollywood moguls continued to sell over one half of all movie tickets to simple minded Blacks between 12 and 24 to allow these racists to improve their ability to oppress Blacks. The Black moviegoers deserve an 'F' also.

"Oppressors, however, came in all colors in 1981. Black on Black crime became a 20th. Century epidemic. More Blacks were killed, in 1977 for example, by other Blacks than were Blacks killed in the entire nine year Vietnam War. By 1979, 85% of all violent crimes committed by Blacks had another Black as a victim.

"Older Blacks, working Blacks and Black women are the helpless prey to a more and more vicious and a younger and younger Negro male thug who is a weapon of genocide against his own people.

"Give the Black community another 'F' for its failure to transmit family values which teach right from wrong rather than a take what you don't have (from other Blacks) "get over" philosophy and blaming white people won't do what we fail-or refuse-to do for ourselves..."

-Excerpted from "Tony Brown's Comments" in the Volume 5, Number 25 issue of the PASADENA GAZETTE. Emphases added.

BLACK MEN AND WOMEN OF NEBRASKA

A book, BLACK MEN AND WOMEN OF NEBRASKA, has just recently been published. This book, written by Donna Polk of Lincoln and funded through a grant from the Nebraska Committee For The Humanities, lists 29 American-born Afrikans who have achieved success and made contributions on various levels in the State of Nebraska.

It is available at a cost of $6.50 per copy from:

The Neb. Blk. History Preservation Society

543 W. Keating Circle

Lincoln, Neb. 68524

SOME DAY I WILL

My mother has calluses on her feet.

And every sunday she squeezes
her feet in the shoes she keeps
in the box in the closet
with the moth balls.

And the dust covers the plastic
of the formal dresses and the other
affairs that she will never go to.

But you see these are the special
shoes she wears at the end of the week.

And no one knows but me
that she has
calluses on her feet.

After washing clothes, making beds,
mopping floors, feeding me and making
the world a little more livable to
live you can see why my mother has
calluses on her feet.

But every sunday she walks in pain,
but in pride. And I wonder why?

And every year I kept telling myself
I'm going to buy her some new shoes.

Some day I will.

But I never do.

-Tyrone Stacy Eure

IN THE WINDOW

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i could not taste thunder
for the sound of it was too bitter
i could not bear to part my lips
far enough
to let in the sound
for fear
it would
too severely
coat my tongue
that i would not be able to dance
with such a taste
to stunt my pace

i am not a mannequin in
a store window
pretending to body english
as people marvel
at my stillness
their language and mine
are not the same

even though a brick flies
through the glass
and i appear
to have come to life
all the time i was living
and "thunder" was not my name
you were so stormy as to shun me
thinking
thunder and clouds the same.

-David L. Rice

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